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SUBJECT: DAS RUSSELL'S SEPTEMBER 28 MEETING WITH DFM KARASIN

Classified By: DCM Eric S. Rubin for reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin told visiting DAS Dan Russell September 28 that the U.S. decision on missile defense created trust in the U.S.' "reset" intentions with Russia, although U.S.-Russia cooperation in some areas of the post-Soviet space would not be easy. The Russian approach in Georgia was based on the Russian troops' and EU monitors' stabilizing presence, and it was futile to hope that the Geneva talks could recreate Georgia's territorial integrity. Karasin underscored Russia's continued cooperation with Ukraine, despite Moscow's refusal to engage with President Yushchenko. Expressing concern about Tiraspol's reactions to the new government in Chisinau, Karasin called for a united, neutral Moldova with a special status for Transnistria. He saw changes for the better in Belarus' development, and said that Azerbaijan's reaction to a normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey depended on the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. End Summary.

U.S.-Russia relations

¶2. (C) In a September 28 meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin, DAS Dan Russell reviewed developments in the former Soviet space and urged more predictability and transparency in Russia's activities and policies in the region. Russell noted that as part of the fresh start in U.S.-Russia relations, the U.S. was trying to take the same approach and cited transparency over the IR-10 exercise in Georgia as an example. That said, Russell reiterated that we have fundamental differences in some areas, most notably over Georgia, and that the U.S. would never recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Karasin welcomed the recent U.S. decision on missile defense, saying it created trust that the reset in U.S.-Russia relations was more than just words. While the U.S.' priorities in Central Asia, specifically Afghanistan, were well-understood in Moscow, Karasin agreed that the U.S. and Russia cooperation in other areas of the post-Soviet space would not be easy.

Georgia

¶3. (C) Karasin said that the U.S. and Russian positions on Georgia differed in principle, stating that the Russian approach to the situation was based on the "stabilizing presence" of Russian troops in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, with EU monitors fulfilling the same function in undisputed Georgia. One sign of that arrangement's success was the peaceful anniversary of the August 2008 war, despite Georgian provocations, but also thanks to U.S. efforts.

14. (C) Karasin described the Geneva talks as a "very useful" forum for South Ossetian, Abkhaz, and Georgians to talk directly with one another, but criticized what he called Georgian attempts to "internationalize" the talks. He stated that the talks would not produce support for Georgia's territorial integrity, and said that Russia would not agree to international observers in Georgia until Tbilisi had restored good-neighborly relations with the breakaway regions. It was "naive" to think that Georgia could once again "dominate" the regions, he added.

15. (C) As with the Geneva talks, Karasin called the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms useful, but insisted the mechanisms must discuss practical questions and find practical results. However, he cautioned that the mechanisms needed to work at their own pace.

16. (C) Karasin expressed his expectation that the EU Commission for investigating the conflict in the Caucasus in August 2008 would produce a "balanced" report, but said it "would be a pity" if it did not send signals to the GOG on who was at fault for destroying Georgia's territorial integrity. Karasin blamed Saakashvili for the conflict, pointing out that Georgia, not Russia, had severed diplomatic relations, and that the large number of Georgians living in Russia made it senseless for Russia to seek to destroy Russia-Georgia ties.

Ukraine

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17. (C) In view of the upcoming elections in Ukraine, Karasin said Russia supported no single candidate, but hoped for a leader who wanted normal relations with Russia. While Moscow waited for the January elections to replace Yushchenko, Karasin underscored that Russia remained engaged with Ukraine, noting that Lavrov would meet Acting Foreign Minister Khandogiy in Kharkiv on October 6-7. Karasin also expressed hope that Ambassador-designate Zurabov could soon be sent to Kyiv and welcomed former Ambassador Viktor Chernomyrdin's intentions to stay involved in Ukrainian affairs.

Moldova

18. (C) Karasin cautioned that no decisions should be made at the October 6 "3 plus 2" talks on Transnistria in Vienna without first consulting the parties to the conflict. In addition, it was incumbent upon the "3 plus 2" members to treat the parties as equal partners in the political dialogue.

19. (C) Noting Presidential Administration Head Sergey Naryshkin's positive assessment of all Moldovan parties' willingness to work to develop Russian-Moldovan relations, Karasin expressed concern about Tiraspol's reactions to the new government in Chisinau. GOM efforts to quickly integrate into Europe along with Romanian attempts to draw Moldova closer could cause Transnistria to "go its own way," which Karasin described as a "regrettable" outcome. He rejected as "incorrect" any talk of a "quick" resolution that called for the withdrawal of Russian troops. Instead, Karasin hoped the new government of Moldova would accept all agreements on Transnistria since 1992, which foresaw a united, neutral Moldova with a special status for Transnistria.

Belarus

110. (C) Karasin saw changes for the better in Belarus'

development, noting movement on human rights and the prospect of the customs union with Russia overcoming "emotional barriers," as Belarus sought to no longer stand aside in the world arena.

Armenia

¶11. (C) Karasin called on the U.S. to play a positive role in the Armenia-Turkey rapprochement, noting that Azerbaijan was concerned about the process. He said that Baku's reaction to a normalization of relations between Yerevan and Ankara depended on the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It was incumbent that Baku reacted in the best way to the Armenia-Turkey developments, Karasin warned.

¶12. (U) DAS Russell cleared this cable.
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